

VZCZCXRO3420  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHPW  
DE RUEHIL #1329/01 0820915  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 230915Z MAR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7922  
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2134  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0060  
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU PRIORITY 0103  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4892  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4105  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1246  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6957  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5358  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0616  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4545  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2867  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5276  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1824  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0107  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2064  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001329

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR CROCKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: WHAT THE CHIEF JUSTICE CONTROVERSY IS. . .AND IS  
NOT

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Two weeks in -- and occasionally breathless commentary in the international press aside -- observers increasingly believe that President Musharraf's government has not been seriously wounded by the Chief Justice controversy. Barring the outbreak of widespread street violence leading to civilian deaths, we do not see Musharraf's situation changing in the near future. Indeed, if anything, some good may eventually come of this episode.

¶2. (C) While things can change quickly in this country, we present here some important observations.

WHAT THE CHIEF JUSTICE CONTROVERSY IS NOT -- AS OF NOW

¶3. (C) THIS IS NOT AN IMMINENT THREAT TO MUSHARRAF'S RULE: He has weathered worse storms, including the public reaction to the Damadola attack; the Danish Cartoon protests; and two assassination attempts. Both Damadola and the Danish cartoons resonated with the poor and working classes. This controversy does not. The vast majority of Pakistanis are not adequately literate to understand the intricacies of the Chief Justice proceedings. Even senior PPP leaders remind us that their constituents do not see how this controversy affects the things that matter most to them: food, shelter, and personal safety.

¶4. (C) THIS IS NOT THE EVENT THAT WILL UNITE THE OPPOSITION: The PPP is maintaining a low profile and has been at pains to separate itself from the MMA at rallies. Not only does the PPP not want to strengthen the religious parties, it does not want street protests to become violent or spiral out of control, which might in turn bring about a military crack-down. The PPP worries that widespread violence might lead to a postponement of Benazir Bhutto's

return, which is still under negotiation.

15. (C) THIS IS NOT AN EVENT THAT HAS CAUSED IRREPARABLE, EXTREME HARM TO MUSHARRAF'S REPUTATION: The President's quick apology to Geo Television, his agreeing to be interviewed on a Geo program on March 20, and his arranging for the highly-respected Justice Bagwandas to become the new Acting Supreme Court Judge, rather than the initially appointed (and less admired) Javed Iqbal, have helped to curb domestic criticism and prevent extreme political damage. That said, some PPP leaders believe that Musharraf is adequately worried about his reputation that he may seek to renew negotiations that would allow a cooperative PPP/PML-Q arrangement either before or after the next election. While the PPP initially told us that negotiations were "off" because of the Chief Justice controversy, they now tell us they are willing to talk again.

WHAT THIS CONTROVERSY IS -- AS OF NOW

16. (C) THE EPISODE IS AN INDICTMENT OF THE PAKISTANI POLICE: The PML-Q, PPP, and MMA agree on one thing about the next election: law and order will be a major issue for voters. The refusal of the police who stormed the Geo television station to take orders from Minister of Information Durrani -- an exchange that was broadcast live -- resonates with poor Pakistanis, who bear the brunt of police corruption. The government's difficulty assigning blame to senior officials also resonates with Pakistanis. Ever since a reorganization scheme removed district officials and provincial home secretaries from the police chain of command,

ISLAMABAD 00001329 002 OF 002

authority over the police has resided only with the Minister of Interior in Islamabad. Observers have noted a marked rise in police misconduct as accountability from civilian authorities has become more distant. PML leaders tell us they believe the police misconduct issue could hurt them in the election if the government does not act to rein in misbehavior.

17. (C) THE DEMONSTRATIONS INDICATE THAT THE POLICE NEED MORE TRAINING: Lack of riot control skills was painfully clear as police hurled at protesters bricks that had first been thrown at the police. Additionally, the destruction at Geo television and at lawyers' offices around the country indicates the general lack of professional training and competence in many parts of the police forces. (Note: In this vein, Post identified riot control training as an important priority for 2007 Anti-Terrorism Assistance programming. End Note.)

18. (C) EXTERNAL COMMENTARY IS NOT WELCOME: Both Pakistani Government and opposition contacts have palpably resented public comments by EU officials criticizing the handling of the Chief Justice Affair. The resentment on both sides has little to do with the merits of the complaints. Instead, as our contacts remind us, Pakistanis, including elected officials, have been resolving the problem on their own. The civil society prefers the controversy to focus on its own complaints and accomplishments. They also note that they are in the best position to produce statements that will prevent the medicine (the protests) from becoming worse than the disease.

19. (C) Comment: Musharraf's initial failure to seek adequate political advice before moving against the Chief Justice could have damaged his and the PML's electoral prospects. Rapid distancing of the PML from the controversy, coupled with Musharraf's common sense damage control seems to have prevented irreparable harm. The reputation of the police, though, has clearly suffered a significant (and deserved) blow. Indeed, this episode is an important reminder of the fundamental importance of our various law enforcement training programs -- and the need to consider

expanding those programs to include riot control training.

CROCKER